

OPERATION HONOR

In 2005, retired Air Force Capt. Earl Morse, a Veterans Affairs physician assistant found none of his patients had visited the [WWII Memorial](#). He pitched the idea to members of the neighboring Wright-Patterson AFB aeroclub to fly veterans to Washington and escort them to their national memorial. May of that year, the first flight departed from Springfield, Ohio with 12 veterans in six aircraft. In less than two years the idea exploded, and the [Honor Flight Network](#) was born.

Now with over 128 hubs in 45 states and more than 300,000 veteran experiences achieved, the very first hub will shutter, close, or merge due to the significant reduction in applicants. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of that very first flight and the last mission on the 21st of September 2025 for [Honor Flight Dayton](#), located in both the birthplace of the program and aviation. OPERATION HONOR represents the closure of a monumental American chapter honoring our WWII, Korean, Cold War, and Vietnam veterans.

The [Hanoi Taxi](#), a C-141 later assigned to the [445th Airlift Wing](#), airlifted the first American POWs to freedom from Hanoi, North Vietnam. The same year Honor Flight was started, retired [Maj. Gen. \(R\) Edward Mechenbier](#), himself a Vietnam POW, flew the *Hanoi Taxi* back to Vietnam to [repatriate the remains of two Americans](#). The Hanoi Taxi was last flown in May 2006 and is on display at the [National Museum of the U.S Air Force](#) (NMUSAF).

To honor the *Hanoi Taxi*, the Air Force Reserve Command's 445th Airlift Wing is designating one of its C-17 aircraft the *Spirit of the Hanoi Taxi* to be unveiled at a ceremony on Friday the 19th of September 2025, [National POW/MIA Recognition Day](#). On the 21st, this aircraft and another C-17 will fly OPERATION HONOR with Maj. Gen. Mechenbier, Capt. Morse, other POWs and over one hundred veterans on board, bookending the [Air Force Marathon](#) weekend at Wright-Patterson AFB.

In recognition of this concurrent monumental flight and the Air Force Marathon on the 20th, the *Hanoi Taxi* be one of the race's featured aircraft. The NMUSAF will open the original *Hanoi Taxi* to display the usually concealed POW signatures during the regularly scheduled pre-marathon dinner Friday evening. The *Spirit of the Hanoi Taxi* will perform a fly-over of the opening ceremony and the Honor Flight veterans will assist in presenting runners their medals at the finish line.

Planning continues with Honor Flight Dayton, the USAF Marathon, the NMUSAF, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and the 88th Air Base Wing to include hosting the departure and public-access celebratory return, an entertainment headliner, a fly-over of the returning C-17s over the waiting concert, and the execution of a ceremonial water-arch over the aircrafts. Distinguished Visitor events will take place on Saturday to include the OPERATION HONOR Dinner & NMUSAF Open house hosted by the Dayton Development Coalition (DDC) and JobsOhio with behind-the-scenes aircraft tours, meal and cocktails by the Spirit of the Hanoi Taxi C-141.